

February 27, 2002

The Paul Revere Forum: National Security Whistleblowers Speak, Canon House Office Building, Room 402

Statement Of Mathew Zipoli, Vice President, Security Police Officer's Association, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Let me start off by thanking everyone present for providing us time to present you with our views on Security Deficiencies plaguing our nation's nuclear facilities, specifically Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories (LLNL), and how these deficiencies can be remedied. I would particularly like to thank the team at the Government Accountability Project and my lawyer and friend from GAP, Tom Carpenter, for making it possible to be with you today.

As you know, the Lawrence Livermore lab is a part of the University of California system that operates under a contract with the U.S. Department of Energy (DoE). The area that forms part of the immediate hazard zone should some catastrophic event occur includes major portions of the San Francisco Bay area.

In February 2000, my fellow Special Response Team member Charles Quinones and I attempted to raise serious and systemic concerns about security at the Lab. Finding no response with management, we approached the Department's Office of Inspector General, who initiated an investigation. That investigation, release in October of last year, vindicated all of our concerns. Officer Quinones and I were fired one week before the report was released.

I have been fired for telling the truth about unacceptable security deficiencies.

As Vice President of the Security Police Officers Association, I represent approximately 150 Security Police Officers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. As a Security Police Officer my main mission is the protection of special nuclear material and associated classified information, and if necessary, recapture and recovery of those items if the situation warrants.

As all of us are aware, recent events have reshaped our attitudes towards homeland security. The question is no longer; "do terrorists have the capability of deploying a weapon of mass-destruction against the United States?" The question is "when, and how they are going to accomplish this task?"

The Department of Energy has recognized and acknowledged that the most probable and devastating physical threat they must be prepared to neutralize is a terrorist assault whose intent is to accomplish industrial, toxicological, and/or radiological sabotage.

"Does Livermore Labs have the capability of defending itself from a terrorist assault?" In my view, and under current conditions, NO.

If a significant release of radioactive materials were to occur at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the entire San Francisco Bay area could be affected. It only takes a speck of plutonium to kill a person. Eight million people live within a 50-mile radius of the laboratory. LLNL's facilities contain around 880 pounds of plutonium, some of it in oxide or powder form.

The four main threats to the complex have been identified as: attacks by weapons of mass destruction, truck bombs, the creation of an "improvised nuclear device" (a weapon capable of the destruction of Nagasaki or Hiroshima) taken from nuclear materials from the site and lastly, the theft of nuclear secrets.

The security department at Livermore is made up of approximately 150 security officers. They have one of the highest risk positions at LLNL and yet remain some of the lowest paid employees in the entire facility -- the gardeners receive higher salaries. The security personnel are underpaid and under-trained. They are not even sworn-in peace officers.

For the past two years, I, and other officers, have raised serious concerns about the safety, health, and security provided by the facility. The DOE Office of Inspector General investigated and confirmed the security deficiencies we raised in a report issued on October 6, 2001. We were fired one week before this report was issued.

Obvious vulnerabilities we identified and reported at Livermore could lead to massive loss of life, irreversible environmental contamination, and a public health catastrophe that could last for decades.

I continue to hear from my fellow officers at Livermore that conditions have not changed since I was fired. Unless Congress takes immediate and drastic steps to improve nuclear security at places like Livermore, the American public is at grave risk. Thank you for your attention.